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ALASKA BEARS AT HOME

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio talk by Elizabeth Pitt, Forest Service, and Wallace Kadderly, Radio Service, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture portion of the National Farm and Home Hour Monday, January 16, 1939, by the National Broadcasting Company and 99 associated radio stations.

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KADDERLY:

Elizabeth Pitt of the Forest Service is meeting with us again today... and that means we may expect another nature story based on the National Forests.

Let's see, Betsy, the last time you were here you told us about the deer farm on the Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina. What's it to be today?

PITT:

A visit to Admiralty Island.

KADDERLY:

Let's see---that island is located---

PITT:

Off the coast of southeastern Alaska. It's a part of the Tongass National Forest.

KADDERLY:

Oh yes, it comes to me now...Admiralty Island in the Tongass National Forest...that's where there are so many grizzly bears and Alaska brown bears.

PITT:

That's right. And it's about those bears that I want to talk for just a minute or two.

Farm and Home friends, as Mr. Kadderly has already indicated, Admiralty Island is one of the places---one of the few places---where the mighty grizzly bear and his enormous brown brother are still fairly plentiful. For that reason, Admiralty Island occupies an extremely important place in the Nation's program of wildlife conservation. And since this island is in one of the National Forests, the protection and the care of the bear population on the island is one of the major responsibilities of the Forest Service.

About five years ago the Forest Service, the Bureau of Biological Survey, and the Alaska Game Commission cooperated in a careful study of conditions on Admiralty Island and worked out a scientific plan to insure the perpetuation of the bears. Not long ago Dr. Homer L. Shantz of the Forest Service went up there to see how the plan was working. (Dr. Shantz is chief of the Wildlife Division of the Forest Service.) He spent several weeks with the bears at home on their trails in the dense spruce and hemlock forests,

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out on the glacial ice, and down by the streams where the salmon were running.

In mid-summer the streams on Admiralty Island are a living mass of fish....churning the water to foam in many places as they push up stream to spawn.....fulfilling the strange demand of reproduction and death made of them by Nature. To the salmon this experience is the climax of life....to the bears on Admiralty Island it's a great lark. Dr. Shantz says that the bears could be seen almost anywhere along the streams, chasing the salmon as much for fun as for food. Some of the bears were remarkably skillful fisherman, others so clumsy that they gave up and were content to eat the scraps left by their more successful brothers.....

Stories have been going around from time to time saying that the Admiralty Island bears are in danger of extinction. Well, that's not true. Five years ago the Forest Service game authorities estimated that there were 900 bears on Admiralty. Now they believe there are nearly twice that many.

KADDERLY:

Well, Betsy, at that rate it shouldn't be long until the bears will be just about over-running Admiralty Island.

PITT:

The increase hasn't arrived at that stage yet, but as the bear population becomes greater than the island can safely support, regulated hunting will be permitted. However, the take will be extremely conservative until more accurate information is available about the mortality of the bears. The Bureau of Biological Survey and the Forest Service are getting authentic information on the life history of the Admiralty Island bears all the time.

Dr. Shantz brought back a report that the first five years of the bear management program on the island have been very satisfactory.

KADDERLY:

In other words, the plan worked out by the Forest Service and the Biological Survey and the Alaska Game Commission is working.

PITT:

Yes, and working extremely well.

And by the way, Wallace, Dr. Shantz brought back some other information... a bear story.

KADDERLY:

Oh, oh. I feel something coming on here.

PITT:

Two Alaska old-timers were with Dr. Shantz on his inspection trip -- Jay Williams and Bernie Aikens, and it was Captain Aikens who told Dr. Shantz this story:

It seems that a rather cantankerous grizzly treed Captain Aikens one time, and he sat in the tree for hours and hours and hours with the bear watching him carefully every minute. By and by the bear evidently thought he was up there to stay, and trotted off, apparently discouraged. The Captain waited until he felt it was quite safe and then began to climb down. Just as he was about to swing to the ground he heard a noise down the trail --- and what do you suppose caused that noise, Wallace?

KADDERLY:

I suppose I'm supposed to say that the bear was coming back.

PITT:

Yes, it was the bear all right, coming up the trail. But the bear wasn't alone. The bear was driving a beaver up the path....to cut down that tree.

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